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## Beating the Bounds

Where are the boundaries of the Church, and what do they look like? In this issue we take a walk around the 'edges' of the Church. Who is 'in'? Who prefers to be 'out'? We consider how the Church can appear from its borders and ask how it can best relate to those exploring the possibility of faith, to those in the wider world, and to those who already live within the boundaries of another faith tradition.

## Servant, Sacrament, Pilgrim People Models for the Church in the World by Brian Russell

**M**'Lord, give us today the Church for tomorrow.  
May we pray to be given today the Church for tomorrow? What would we receive and would we like it? Who might it include or exclude? How, in God's Spirit, might this Church urge us to engage in the life of the world as part of responding to God's mission already to be found there?

Today is becoming very different from yesterday. Some say that it is the move from an era of modern life to the new and uncharted territory of a post-modern society. All is coming into the melting pot, and the Church with it. The past may give us some bearings, but these need to be re-conceived if we are to be in readiness for what God, through Christ, brings.

Over the last five years, I have been working with lay people in the diocese of Birmingham on a course called Being the Church in Post-Modern Society. We have considered the roots of our Church as One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. Many participants have been 'apostolic' people in their local Churches, people who are 'foundational' in terms of identity, continuity and hope. Both the Lima text and the Porvoo Declaration – key ecumenical texts on the Church – point us to lay people as part of what makes up the apostolic continuity and spur towards mission. So, what models of the Church seemed to have been engaging for these participants? In

broad terms, I offer three models for your reflection. They don't cover all points – but they are triggers for you to consider your own response.

### *A Church that serves God's Kingdom in the World*

This model, not new, still has mileage in new circumstances. As God's people, we can be built up to share in God's mission in the world through all that we offer and are in our daily discipleship (wherever that happens) Monday to Saturday. Life links with Mission (as it takes place within God's active presence or mission in the world) and Mission is nurtured through Worship.

We can think of moving in a continuing circle. We come to worship from an engagement in the world, but do not leave it behind. It is part of us, informing and being given new meaning in our worship, ideally, through preaching, prayer and reflection. Through worship, we are at best nurtured in God's mystery and presence, supported and built up, offered up, lifted up and then sent

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out again with renewed perspective and energy into this wider realm of God's active presence. This gives real substance to our offertory, to holding out our broken and faulted efforts at being and doing, so that God can take, lift up, bless and hand back our lives with renewed support that releases new action and presence.

*God's people are to be an Open Community, reaching out for contact – sharing both hopes and hurts – to draw others into the journeying through solidarity and shared support.*

The focus is on the Church as playing a part in Kingdom building, as a space through which movement happens, not as a static container that is held back from the world. This is not abstract. Many churchgoers sustain demanding involvements in paid work and volunteer work in society and community. Too rarely do they feel really upheld and informed for this by their Church life and worship.

**Church as a Sacrament in God's World**  
Sacrament is not a post-modern word! Symbols can be obscure and remote once the reference system that provides their range of meanings is lost. But today is a visual age: pictures can speak and open up ranges of meaning, meanings that can unfold and can be informed (in time) through conversation and even teaching. Sacraments can be open, to participation and to be given different responses by people at different points.



*The Reverend Canon Dr Brian Russell is Bishop's Director for Ministries in the Diocese of Birmingham.*

God continues the incarnation, found in Christ, through the present moments of history. God's active presence is giving hope, purpose, direction, challenge, forgiveness and wholeness.

There are two channels for God's gifts. The first is through the world as God's creation, a creation to which God is deeply connected and committed and therefore which is also the field of God's saving. The second channel is through the Church as a sacrament, meaning a vehicle or means, a channel that mediates God's being and action. This mediation catches up the people of the Christian Faith and urges and equips them to go out to engage in God's world. Sensitized and strengthened, the people are to be 'walking sacraments' in fulfilling their baptism. It is in daily encounters and meetings that we, with others, find and participate in Christ's presence.

These moments of encounter are signs: we can think of electric currents being activated so that sparks fly. The Christ in us meets the Christ in the world and something emerges from this. I call them 'fizzy moments': events or meetings that arise and energize and point beyond themselves. Christ's presence, which is everywhere, is focussed and made apparent, so that responses can be made in unanticipated ways at particular times and particular places.

*Today is a visual age: pictures can speak and open up ranges of meaning, meanings that can unfold and can be informed.*

Bonhoeffer pictures God's people as being 'formed' or built up to be Deputies: representatives who are there for Christ at the centre of the world; people who convey word and sacrament by what they are and what they do; people who share in the prophetic task of 'doing the truth' in the world.

#### **Church as God's Pilgrim People in Mystical Community**

The appeal here is the sense of anticipation for oneself, and the scope for journey, for coming to new points and growth along the way. It runs counter to today's world in terms of seeking to draw community together from the fragmented lives of individuals.

God is source of being, Guide along the way (fellow traveller alongside us) and God holds before us a Goal for the Journey. God can interact with us at each point along the way, and this relating to us can draw us and creation towards the Kingdom of God.

The journey is Mystical, ideally, when it is focussed on God. The journey is about being

drawn into a corporate life as God's people, as those in communion with God, together the Body of Christ.

The journey is not straightforward, either for individuals or for gatherings and communities who form along the way. There are ups and downs, twists and turns, dips and peaks, losing our way and being found again in God's Spirit.

God's people are to be an Open Community, reaching out for contact – sharing both hopes and hurts – to draw others into the journeying through solidarity and shared support. We are included in order to include others; we who drink Christ's Cup are to bring life to others.

*Lord, create in us an open and contrite space so that we may receive today the gift of your church for tomorrow.* f

## **Important Announcement to all Subscribers**

SSF *franciscan* magazine has held the same subscription rates since January 1995 but, with price rises in virtually every aspect of publishing, packaging and postage, we regret that we are now forced to move onto new subscription rates from January 2003. Eight years at the same price is not a bad record and we hope that you will remain supportive of us through this transition. Those who have paid their subscription several years in advance will obviously continue to receive the magazine at the price at the time of payment.

#### **Method of Payment**

We are also moving over to a system of payment by DIRECT DEBIT, rather than by Banker's Standing Order. The latter system has proved quite confusing to some subscribers (and to us at times!) and we hope that the new system will be both easier to understand and to administer. You will need to have access to a UK bank or building society account for the Direct Debit system to function.

Our preferred method of payment will now be by Direct Debit, but for those who wish to continue subscribing by credit card, cheque, postal order, cash, etc., this will continue to be possible.

Overseas subscribers are not affected by this change of method of payment.

#### **Members of the Third Order**

If you are a member of the *European Province of the Third Order of SSF*, you were promised a change in the last issue which is not going to happen, for the present at least. The Third Order Chapter have decided not to go ahead with a proposal for all Tertiaries to receive the magazine at a discount, so you will have to continue subscribing directly via Hilfield, for the time being. We regret raising any hopes in this matter.





# Something Missing?

by Janet Bonney

**Janet Bonney, a paid Community Worker with whom the brothers work on the Ley Hill estate in Birmingham, shared some of her story and reflections in an interview:**

My Mum was brought up to be sort of part of the church, so when we were old enough, although she didn't actually go to church herself, she encouraged us to go to Sunday School. It didn't figure very highly in my life. When I was about seven, we moved house to an estate where there was a new church and my Mum started going then. I always thought it was more for the social side of things, but we didn't really discuss it.

and be 'slagging off' everyone else that they sat in the pew with, that sort of stuff. Whatever sort of values people seem to believe, I don't see them transferred. There are a few individuals, but I don't know whether it's just coincidence that that's just what they're like. Maybe they're the people that do things, and church going is just one of the things they do. I think people have got lots of different reasons for going anywhere haven't they? I like to be part of a group of people together. I get a buzz from it – a group of people gathered to do something – for a carnival, or for a meeting, or at a do at Barnardo's or St Clare's House. So I'm sure people get that from going to church. I don't know what people really believe.

So on those odd occasions when I've been with you brothers in Chapel, it's a bit like being with Grandma. I care about you, all of you, and it matters so much to you. Partly, I want to share in that and, partly, I value it because it makes you do what you do, and I think there must be something in it, something that I'm missing. I think, 'What's that something that they're all part of and I'm not? Is that ever going to happen for me?'

But I think that I just can't understand faith. We have this joke about it being fairy stories, and that's what it's like to me, because I just can't get to that stage. A lot of the Bible is so unbelievable. It doesn't just puzzle me. It amazes me that people believe it. Then some people say that some of it's just picture language, but why is it there anyway then? Why take any of it? How can you believe any of it?

*A lot of the Bible is so unbelievable. It doesn't just puzzle me. It amazes me that people believe it. Then some people say that some of it's just picture language, but why is it there anyway then? How can you believe any of it?*

I can believe that throughout history there have been individuals that have behaved in a way that have made people think, 'Yeah, that was a good way to be and I'd like to be like that person, and we ought all to behave in



that way.' But I can't get to thinking that it was something 'up there' that made them behave in that way. Isn't it just a character trait? I'm an agnostic I suppose. I wouldn't say 'I don't believe,' but I can't find a reason to say 'I do.'

I had a conversation with a visiting brother once about it, and I was saying, 'How can you believe in something when you can't prove it?' And he was sort of saying if people get comfort from it, that it helps them through life, that's OK. And I can see that. But then you've got the greatest con artists in the world that do that sort of thing, don't they? I can see how it supports a lot of people. I always think of it as something for – I don't want to say weak people – but, you know what I mean, the people who need something to support themselves on. And it surprises me then when thinking people – and strong people – have faith. But I've never really talked to anyone about why they believe. I do find the teachings of Jesus attractive. I think he was a really good bloke; the care for those less fortunate, that sort of thing. A lot of the people he helped were the people who weren't particularly 'good people.' If it's that sort of belief that makes you live the life you do then good, but you can do that without believing.

I suppose I would feel differently if I could make sense of the nonsense – if there is a sense. Last Christmas Eve when I was unsure whether to come to the midnight service or not, and I hadn't been to things for a long while for all sorts of reasons – well I felt it was unfair to be with the other people there, with them thinking that I'm sharing what they're feeling, what they're believing, when I'm not. If you went to a classical music appreciation group and everyone was supposed to be there because they were learning classical music and then somebody was listening to Eminem through headphones, you wouldn't feel they should be there would you? I suppose in the end I went hoping to feel something of it – just to feel the 'something' that made it feel right to be there. And I didn't. f

Then when I was barely twelve they were talking about confirmation classes. So I went along, and I don't remember anyone challenging me about why I was there; they didn't examine the faith at all. But I became confirmed, and carried on going until fourteen or fifteen when I drifted away for a long time. My Mum died when I was nineteen, and that shook things a bit. But then, I got married, got divorced, got married again, and that mother-in-law was church-going; very, very committed, Mothers' Union, all that. So I started to go with her and continued with my two children, until they got restless and, when they wanted to do other things on Sunday mornings, we stopped.

I don't think that I ever felt anything much more than the do-goody bit, which I did feel, that it felt right to go to church, that it was the done thing. I was quite close to my mother-in-law and it was nice to share something with her, and do something that made her pleased. It was more than just to please her – it was good to share something with her that mattered to her. It wasn't just about getting brownie points. Because it mattered to her, it mattered to me.

But I used to get frustrated at the people because, at the time I was involved, I was also involved in community activity. Church was meant to be about caring: caring for neighbours, and it used to annoy me that the people who were at church didn't want to get involved. I knew a lot of the people who went to church, and they would come out



# The DNA of a growing church

by Malcolm Grundy



**Church attendance may be in decline for reasons other than a loss of faith. It is possible that enquirers have attended church and found the experience less than they hoped. Others attend less frequently because they despair at congregations or denominations that are unable to come to terms with internal differences. I am part of a European network that is concerned with the ways in which adults can be welcomed, cross boundaries, and enter the church. This movement is called the Adult Catechumenate. It is concerned with the questions which people ask as they make a journey into faith. It believes that adult Christians willing to discuss faith questions are the right people to accompany enquirers.**

I am not writing to commend the Catechumenate, or its sisters Alpha and Emmaus. I am going to tell you what I have learned from these years of work with those on the way in. I have developed a 'template' which can be placed over the life of any congregation. If any one part is missing, this is a dysfunctional place; people are more likely to leave than to join. There have to be thought-through elements of welcome, of how faith is deepened, how decisions in faith are marked with preparation and liturgy, and how a congregation lives together – with its differences and tensions as well as its joys. This template has been called 'discovering the DNA of any congregation'.

*People do not join congregations to be put on the flower rota or the brass-cleaning list. Teachers do not join to run the Sunday School or accountants to become treasurers. Those who join should first meet opportunities to learn about faith and church.*

The Catechumenate uses members of local congregations, in groups convened and supported by the priest, to welcome others into the congregation by a process of sharing together in groups over a year or more. There are four elements: *Welcome*, where initial contacts are made and discussions

begun, *Deepening of Faith* where in-depth discussions take place over some months on subjects suggested by enquirers, a time when the decision for commitment is made leading to baptism and/or confirmation and a time when members of the group share with one another what it 'feels like' to be a member of the eucharistic congregation.

Crossing boundaries in this way, or marking stages on a journey, becomes a sacred shared time with other pilgrims. Across Europe there are stories of what this experience means: 'It was like my wedding day', one lady said as she went to the cathedral with her sponsor and friends for her confirmation; 'It is like coming home', said a man who returned to church after half a lifetime away; 'I can now offer my work up to God', said a stressed worker; 'Our congregation is renewed by people who talk with ease about where they are now in their faith', said one priest.

There are many different ways in which someone can enter a congregation. 'Come in and become like one of us' is not one of them. Welcome as people enter a church can be overdone or it can be understated. The sensitive congregation will give appropriate support before, during and after services. One diet of opportunities to meet people will drive the hesitant away. I know of a congregation that devises a different kind of social occasion or activity each month so that different people can be invited in. I know of another where a couple hold 'newcomers lunches' every so often so that those who are new to the congregation can exchange experiences of joining, and be able to laugh about them!

People do not join congregations to be put on the flower rota or the brass-cleaning list. Teachers do not join to run the Sunday School or accountants to become treasurers. Those who join should first meet opportunities to learn about faith and church. A congregation with no Lent or Advent

activity, no prayer or healing group and no opportunity for bible study, even as notes, has a whole section of its reason for existence missing.

Churches that are growing are those where adults can have the opportunity to get at least some of their questions answered and where all can learn how to pray. The congregation that thinks that midweek activities of any kind are only for enthusiasts is closing itself down, as is the one which has an assumption that Sunday worship can sustain all comers, of all ages, through everything that a week can produce.

'They did not miss us when we were not there for a month'; 'They asked us if we had come to hear our banns read and we kept on saying we were already married!' Expect that enquirers have come because something in them has prompted them to come to this strange building. Expect that there is a grain of faith in parents who ask for their infants to be baptized. Most of all, expect that adults as well as children can come to faith and ask for baptism and confirmation. The congregation without these assumptions does not know how to visit, welcome and invite enquirers into a dialogue about commitment.

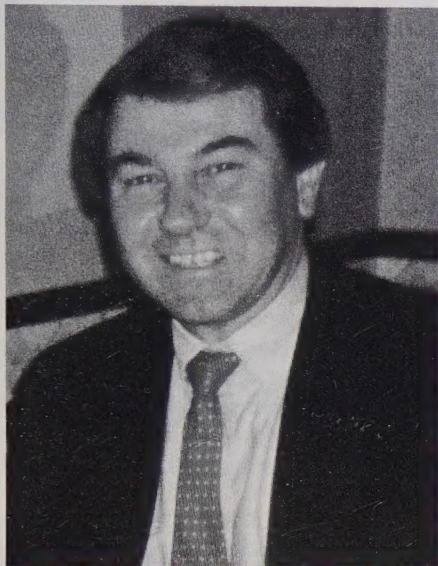
My own view is that every congregation should work out what its policy is for welcome and for invitation into initiation. There may not be anything more than an indiscriminate baptism policy, but it should be discussed and agreed as that. A church without the commitment from lay people to accompany enquirers, be they parents, marriage preparation couples, teenage or adult confirmation candidates is abdicating its faith responsibilities. Clergy should not do all, or any, of this. Their responsibility is to enable the already committed to share their faith and to create a culture within the congregation where welcome, nurture and an invitation to commitment are implicit.

In the Catechumenate there is a wonderful time, after confirmation, when the Eucharistic community welcomes newcomers. I have come to see that this is about as inspiring as 'and they lived happily ever after'. What newcomers enter is a group of people striving to become a community. The idea that life within the church is a bed of roses needs to be contradicted immediately. Our biggest piece of learning when considering ways in and ways out of the church is to want to learn how we tolerate one another and how we live with all the tensions and frustrations which churches by their very nature produce.

Religious Orders are a radical experiment in community. The Third Order, or Iona or Taizé offer to their membership extra resources about life in community to bring



into a congregation. Membership helps some of them to stay in their congregations. Deeper explorations about how the Christian faith is nurtured within the life of a church may help some to stay in. Is it really a model of community? Are tensions ever fully resolved about church order, interpretations of faith, lifestyle and the responsible use of money and buildings? Congregations where these issues are allowed to come to the surface and be managed are ones in which I hope some enquirers might find a welcome which is more than smile deep and where those who might leave can find a reason for hanging on in. *f*



*Malcolm Grundy is Archdeacon of Craven in the Diocese of Bradford. He is the author of the Grove booklet Evangelization through the Adult Catechumenate and, with Peter Ball, of Faith On the Way.*

## *A Sense of the Divine*

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*The greatest need in our time is not simply kerygma, the preaching of the gospel,  
nor for diakonia, service on behalf of justice,  
nor for charisma, the experience of the Spirit's gifts,  
nor even for prophetia, the challenging of the king.*

*The greatest need of our time is for koinonia, the call simply to be the Church -  
to love one another, and to offer our life for the sake of the world.*

*The creation of living, breathing, loving communities of faith at the local church level  
is the foundation of all our answers.*

*Proclamation of the gospel, charismatic gifts, social action and prophetic witness alone  
do not finally offer any real threat to the world as it is,  
especially when set apart from a community which incarnates a whole new order.*

*It is the ongoing life of the community of faith that issues a basic challenge to the world  
as it is, and offers a visible and concrete alternative.*

*The Church must be called to be the Church,  
to rebuild the kind of community that gives substance to the claims of faith.*



# 'The light which enlightens everyone'

## Christianity and Islam

by David Thomas



During the eighth-century expansion of Islam, St John of Damascus portrayed the Saracens as heretics who had borrowed their beliefs from the Bible. During the Crusades, St Francis considered the Moors in such deep need of the gospel that he urged his brothers to risk their lives to preach among them. At the Reformation Martin Luther thought the Turks in Eastern Europe were agents of the devil come to punish sinful Christendom. Today many Christians harbour the sentiment that Muslims are unreasonable and inclined to end differences with violence. How can they be sisters and brothers in faith when they seem so far from the principles on which faith stands?

It is undeniable that the central tenets of Islam are different from the teachings of Christianity. A reading of one of the most important parts of Muslim scripture immediately reveals this:

*Say: He is God, the One,  
God, who stands alone;*

*He does not beget and is not begotten,  
And like him there is not one.*

This is from the Chapter of Purity, from near the end of the Qur'an and, according to the Prophet Muhammad, equal in value to one third of the whole sacred text. It asserts uncompromisingly the oneness of God, his transcendence, invulnerability and disjunction from any other being, and it implies that in the final analysis he cannot be comprehended by finite minds. He is a God who remains mystery.

The Qur'an plays on this fundamental theme throughout its 114 chapters. One

recurring modulation is the denial of any relationship that might suggest communion of being between God and another being. In consequence, the Qur'an unequivocally rejects the possibility that Jesus was divine or the Son of God. 'Jesus son of Mary' is the title he is usually given, and his virgin birth, miracles of healing and ability to raise the dead are all attributed to the infinite power of God to cause such things to happen, rather than interpreted as signs of the divinity of Jesus.

The Qur'an portrays Jesus as a human prophet who was designated by God as one of his messengers. He fulfilled his calling by declaring God's will to one community, and in this he was assisted and safeguarded by God. God protected him to such a degree that when his enemies tried to silence him God saved him and took him to himself:

*They did not kill him or crucify him,  
It appeared so to them.*

In these words we see God in his omnipotence thwarting those who attempted to frustrate his plan by doing away with his messenger. But we also see in a single short sentence a denial of the crucifixion, and so of the atonement. It is not easy to see how Christians might accept Muslims as fellow travellers on the path towards complete communion with God.

The stark disparities between Christianity and Islam over their portrayals of Jesus and their accounts of how God has dealt with the world have been firmly at the centre of relations between the two faiths for all their fourteen hundred years of shared existence. And few have seen beyond these to the striking similarities in attitude, which the two faiths share in other aspects of their belief and action. Among these latter are the insistence that God has created the world and cares for it, has shown humankind the path to sanctification and truth, has given human life a moral charge, and intends his creatures to find their fulfilment on earth in relationship with him and in the hereafter in enjoyment of his rewards. There are huge moral and

ethical overlaps between the two faiths, and Muslims and Christians can find themselves curiously close in their perception of how the individual interacts with society, and their solutions for social malaise.

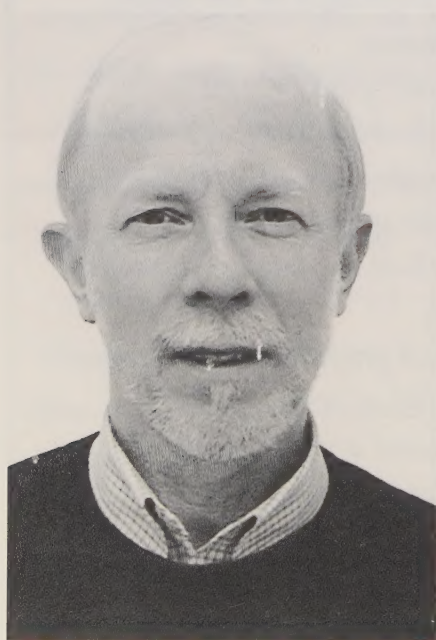
A clergy friend who sits on a school governing body has more than once remarked on how well he gets on with the Muslim chair of governors. They happily co-operate to maintain an explicitly religious atmosphere in this church school, which currently admits all its pupils from Muslim homes. Such examples make it less difficult to see how Christians might be able to travel at least some of the road with Muslims.

*There are aspects of  
Islam that decidedly  
distance Christians, and  
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understanding and  
co-operation.*

So we see there are aspects of Islam that decidedly distance Christians, and aspects that hold some promise of shared understanding and co-operation. The same can probably be said about Christianity and any faith. And it explains how, on the one hand, there must be some sense of distance from believers who either do not share cherished beliefs or openly reject them, and yet how, on the other, there may be some inclusivity towards those with common values who may join in projects that enrich society and enhance communal growth. I may not be able to pass the peace to my Muslim friends, but I can hope to build peace with their help and support.

But if I cannot pass the peace, because that implies accepting a Muslim into the body of Christ, can I get beyond the point of rejecting his beliefs and condemning them as either misunderstood borrowings from Christianity (St John of Damascus) or demonic (Luther)? With the help of a fundamental insight from the gospel of John, this may be possible.

In the outline of the Quranic teaching about God given above, there are many elements that Christians might recognise as familiar. Indeed, many elements of the Quranic teaching about Jesus are also remarkably similar to the gospels. If these are only slavish copies of Christian doctrines intentionally though incorrectly taken over by Muhammad, as St John of Damascus judges, then we must condemn Muhammad as a cheat. But if he was sincere and truthful in claiming they were not his conscious composition, we must attribute them to another source, which can only be inspiration. What form this inspiration took requires careful understanding, whether it was the direct inspiration that replaced Muhammad's human speech with divine (as Muslims believe), or the poetic inspiration



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# Minister's Letter

Sister Helen Julian CSF,  
Minister Provincial of the First Order Sisters,  
European Province, writes:

Dear Friends,

As a new Minister Provincial, I feel like a novice again in many ways. Much of what I'm doing is for the first time; my first time chairing our Provincial Chapter, first visit to one of our houses as Minister, first participation in the annual conference of the leaders of the Anglican Religious communities in this country. It's a heady mixture of excitement at new challenges and new possibilities, and fear of the unknown, fear of failing.

This time of the year, early autumn, probably still has resonances of 'new term' for many of us, however long it is since we finished our formal education. The mingled anticipation and apprehension at the start of a new school year, with new teachers, new subjects, perhaps a new school altogether, is a feeling which we may still experience as we start a new job, or join a new church, or begin to learn a new skill.

Being a beginner again can be uncomfortable and testing, but it can also be a very fruitful place to be. In Zen Buddhism 'beginner's mind' is highly prized. Shunryu Suzuki, a Japanese Zen master who spent a number of years teaching in America, wrote: 'In the beginner's mind there is no thought, "I have attained something." When we have

no thought of achievement, no thought of self, we are true beginners. Then we can really learn something. The beginner's mind is the mind of compassion.'

I suspect that this is something of what Jesus had in mind when he spoke of becoming like little children. Young children have a marvellous capacity to see everything as if for the first time. They haven't been around long enough to become blasé or cynical. Everything is new and exciting.

Francis had something of this quality too. He said about himself 'The Lord has called me to be a new kind of fool in this world.' But his newness was not confined to foolishness. He was new in his passionate attachment to poverty, in the simplicity of his preaching, in his deep reverence for all created things as his sisters and brothers. And to the end of his life he saw himself as a beginner. Near the end of his life he exhorted his brothers, 'Let us begin to serve the Lord, for until now we have accomplished little.'

Perhaps we can use this 'new term time' to value the parts of our lives where we feel like beginners, and to value too the beginners we have around us. Whether they are new members of our churches, the



children in our families, or those just beginning to learn something at which we are already skilled, we have something to learn from them. They can help us to rediscover our 'beginner's mind', that mind open to learning and full of compassion of which both Jesus and the Zen Buddhists speak.

Pax et bonum – Peace and all good.

*Helen Julian CSF*

that enabled him to mould experiences and heard teachings into unforgettable expressions.

However we explain the Qur'an, if we allow it to be the authentic utterances of a sincere man, then we have to concede the possibility of divine involvement, and to acknowledge that the Qur'an might be a material outcome of that Life which is in the Word of God 'and is the light of all people', as John's gospel teaches. That Life, we should note, does not give light to Christians alone but to everyone. So, in exactly the same way as the saints of the church have been reflections of that light, holy people outside the church have also shone with it, including Muhammad.

We reach an intriguing and exciting paradox: the Qur'an as an outcome of the light of the Word may in its alien way have teachings to balance and enrich those given by Christian scripture, which is also an outcome of the light of the Word. No wonder Islam disturbed John of Damascus, Francis and Luther. For here is teaching that appears to contradict the gospel, but which may still be accepted as bearing the touch of God. Christians should maybe learn how to read with sympathy and humility what the Qur'an says, and bring it into relation with the teachings of the Bible. If this took place, and Muslims mirrored it by studying Christian scripture, we might come to realise our two roads are really one, and find we could come to greet one another on the way with sincere signs of peace. *f*

## Theme Prayer

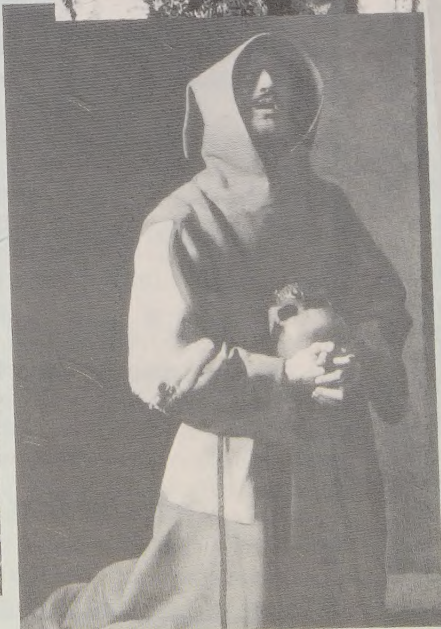
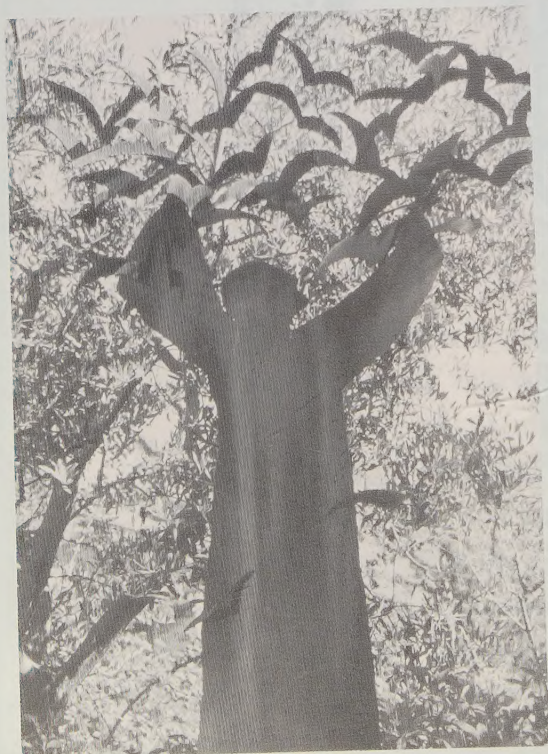
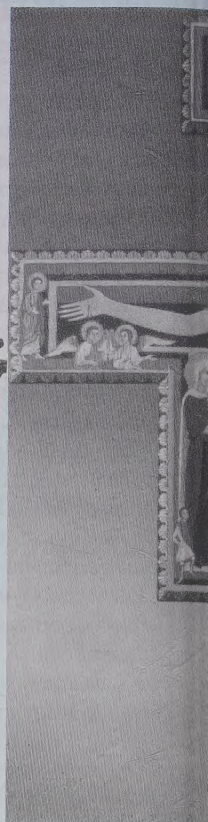
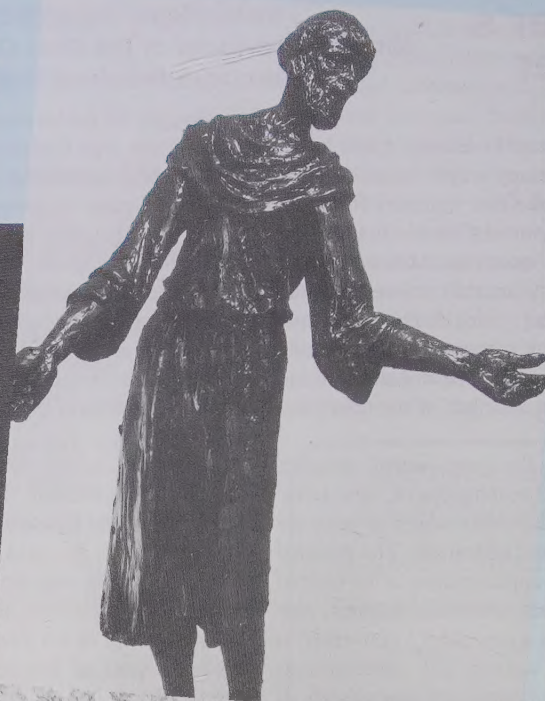


God of revelation,  
whose mercy embraces all peoples and nations:  
tear down the walls which divide us,  
break open the prisons which hold us captive  
and so free us to celebrate your beauty  
in all the earth;  
through Jesus,  
our Brother and our Redeemer. Amen.

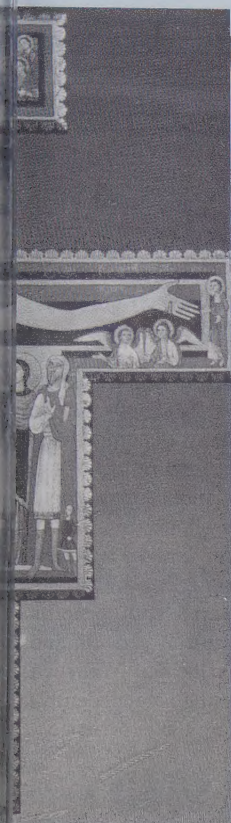
*Jim Picken*



# *Francis in Art*



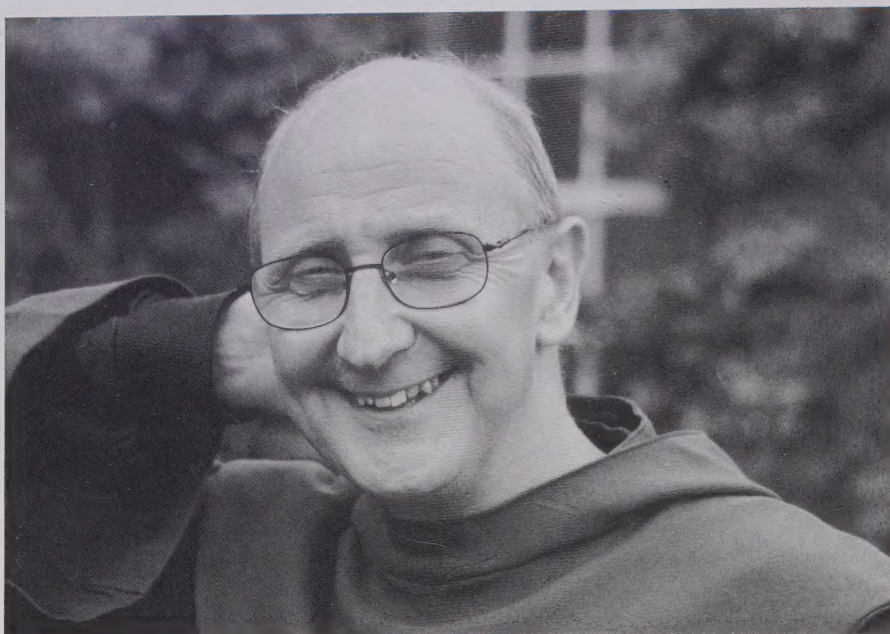




Representations of Francis in art are probably at least as numerous as the books written about him. Pictured here, surrounding his beloved San Damiano crucifix (a recently-'written' ikon in the chapel at Hilfield) is one from our Friary in New Zealand, with Francis pointing towards Christ his Saviour; two carvings by the late Sister Angela: one at Freeland, the other at Hilfield; Francis and Clare, from America; Francis the Teacher, a MaKondi carving from Tanzania; a banner from the Piazza Communale in Assisi, with Francis at the feet of Our Lady; the old statue which used to be in the Hilfield courtyard; Francis and a child, at the Carceri on Monte Subasio; Francis with his arms raised in adoration, at Compton Durville; two modern representations, from St Anthony's in Assisi; the kneeling Francis (holding a skull, depicting his mortality), by Francisco de Zurbaran; and finally Francis with a basket-nest of living doves, in the corridor at St Mary of the Angels, on the plain below Assisi.



# Community Routes



Samuel SSF

## ◆◆ Minister SSF

Brother **Samuel** has been elected as Minister of the European Province of the First Order Brothers of the Society of St Francis, in succession to Brother **Damian** (who has completed his maximum term of service). He was blessed into office on 13 June 2002 at the end of the Brothers' Provincial General Chapter and took over the reins on 1 July.

Samuel is fifty-five years old and has been a member of SSF since 1974. He was ordained thirty-two years ago and has served in SSF as Novice Guardian, then more recently as Guardian of Hilfield Friary until 2000 and is at present Vicar of St Bene't's Church, Cambridge.

Samuel has appointed **Benedict** as his Assistant Minister, **David Francis** as Novice Guardian and Deputy Minister with responsibility for Formation, **Desmond Alban** as Provincial Secretary and **Jonathan** as Provincial Bursar.

## ◆◆ Wizard in Oz

*Brother Bernard writes:*

I am very grateful to have been given a sabbatical in Australia where, some thirty years ago, I lived and worked for six years. By the kindness of friends, and travelling as far as Sydney and Cairns, I was able to visit people I'd known. It was deeply nourishing to see so many lovely, mature people.

But I began with an individual retreat guided by a Franciscan sister. For fifty years, I have revered the *San Damiano* Cross, yet – for the first time – I realised that Jesus was not depicted nailed to the cross. Rather, he is risen, standing in front of the

cross, with arms wide open to humanity! It was in Lent, so I had time to digest this reality in terms of the closeness of suffering and the victorious love of God.

Next, I spent three weeks at Najara, a retreat centre in a forest in North Queensland. Here I lived in a shed-like cell, enjoying one cooked meal a day, and having plenty of time to read, write and pray. I read Brüggemann's new *Old Testament Theology*, Bonaventure, and further pursued my interest in the Enneagram.

Back in Brisbane, I spent time with the brothers, who were very hospitable and in lively form, with postulants joining and a wide, Pacific vision. More brothers came for their Provincial Chapter, and soon after there were two life professions.

From temperatures of around 30°C, I returned to London at 10°C and caught a bug but, as I write this six weeks later, I begin to feel myself again.

## ◆◆ Restore

'Restore' is the name of a Christian organisation in the West Midlands whose members come from many denominations and whose aim is to befriend refugees and asylum seekers. A befriender learns about the legislation and is then allotted to a family (or individual) with whom to make friends – through regular visits, through conversation, through support in dealing with benefits agencies, housing department, schools and language learning. **Anselm** and **Maureen** are both members (operating independently) and are gaining much from the experience.

## ◆◆ Selbitz Visit

*Brother Paschal writes:*

Alnmouth Friary hosted a week-long ecumenical visit from ten German Lutheran Sisters from **Christus Bruderschaft**, Selbitz. As well as providing essential rest for the Sisters, who run their one-hundred bed guest-house, time was also allocated for shared prayer, discussion and mutual exploration of our respective communities, founders, history and charisms.

It was a joy to discover how much St Francis had influenced their Mother Foundress and how, even today, the sisters are encouraged to make a pilgrimage to Assisi before making life profession.

The Selbitz Sisters (approximately one hundred and fifty in number) and Brothers (about ten in total) each have their own



*A large contingent of brothers and sisters from the First and Third Orders attended the mass lobby of Parliament on 20 June, to press for **Just Trade** between the nations of the world. The campaign is sponsored by Christian Aid and many other aid agencies.*



Superior. They work in priories in Germany, especially with young people and the elderly, and in Africa.

The sisters, in their grey habits, with a white, knotted, cord waist-band, white veils and silver cross, soon became a familiar sight in the village and their joyful faces made a deep impression on people. Yet it was in chapel that their deep faith, dignified reverence and beautiful singing gave us a real insight into the heart of their Order.

During their visit, the sisters were able to visit some of the local holy sites, but the highlight for all of us was the celebration of the feast of Corpus Christi, when we feasted on the generosity of Christ. We look forward to a growing friendship between Alnmouth and Selbitz, as we seek to uncover unity between our two Churches.

## ◆◆Expo Cantuar

Greyfriars in Canterbury is an oasis of calm in the centre of a busy city, with its regular services organised by the Companions and the permanent Franciscan exhibition in the remaining medieval building. The exhibition has been professionally restaged, produced collaboratively by Anglicans and Roman Catholics and designed to be accessible to all ages and backgrounds. The centre piece (literally) is a stunning hanging print of Francis preaching. After a Eucharist celebrated by Revd David Hayes, parish priest and Warden of Greyfriars, the exhibition was officially opened in May by **Carolyn Clapperton**, Minister Provincial TSSF, in the presence of the Mayor and a wide cross-section of parishioners and Anglican and Roman Catholic Religious.

## ◆◆AnotherGubbio

Plaistow may not be Gubbio and urban foxes may only be small cousins of wolves, but visitors to SSF Plaistow may get glimpses in the evenings and early mornings of a fox family that has taken up residence in the walled garden. Watching the fox cubs chasing and romping together on the lawn is proving to be a delight to many.

## ◆◆Option for the Poor

In March, a number of brothers and sisters involved in different ways in living out the Franciscan 'Option for the Poor' met at St Andrew's Conference Centre, Plaistow. Every Province of the First Order was represented. This international flavour offered a rare opportunity to share our particular experience of working with poor, marginalized and rejected people, wherever we find ourselves as Franciscans. Whatever our context, the attempt to live out our own vow of poverty with integrity is an essential part of the relationships we build with those in our locality. During the conference, we visited a project for homeless people run by

Roman Catholic Franciscans in Canning Town. We also heard something of the work of Franciscan Aid, and Tim Moulds of Christian Aid joined us to discuss exciting plans to further their links with SSF – watch this space!

## ◆◆Pray for Peace

Some of the brothers and sisters will be involved with *Prayers for Peace*, a multi-faith witness, to be held on 28 September, 2002, at St Martin-in-the-Fields, London, at noon. The event has been organised by the Franciscan Association of Great Britain, and anyone who is interested to attend will be warmly welcomed.

## ◆◆On the Way

*Brother Augustine Thomas writes:*

The May Bank Holiday saw thirteen Religious travel to Alnmouth for the Anglican First-Professed Conference. It was a very diverse group representing ten communities.

At the heart of the conference was prayer and worship, both with the Alnmouth Brothers and together as a group; this included singing Evensong in the Priory at Lindisfarne and praying in Brinkburn Priory.

There were two speakers: Revd Professor Nick Sagovsky, who spoke about partnership and the relationship between the Church and Religious Communities; and Bishop Paul Richardson, who spoke on prophetic witness. Both these talks sparked off lively discussion between participants.

The main benefit from the conference was the opportunity to talk with others at the same stage of Religious life. This happened in formal sessions, in the refectory and in rather more informal settings. It was also good to make new contacts and renew old friendships. As a result a Newsletter has been started to enable us to keep in touch with each other. We expect to meet in



*Sue CSF and Bishop Michael after her life profession at Compton Durville on 16 April.*

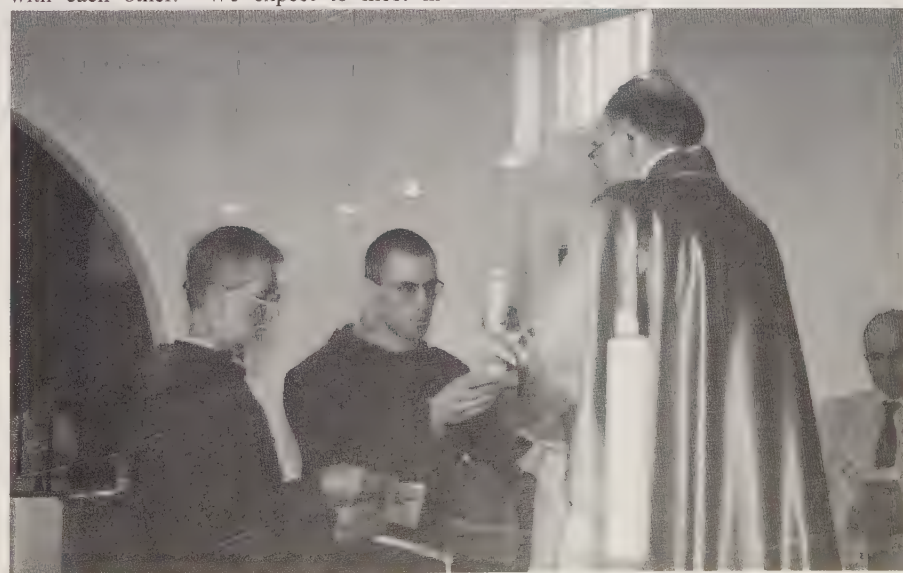
Ditchingham next year.

## ◆◆Round up

**Wayne Martin** has been elected to profession in first vows and the ceremony is expected to take place at Alnmouth Friary on 7 October at noon.

**Hubert** has moved to a nursing home in Sherborne; **James Anthony** is at present living back in England, caring for his sick father; **Kentigern John** has returned to the UK from New Zealand; **Martin Philip** expects to move to Cambridge in late August; **Michael** has moved to a nursing home in Cambridge; **Selwyn Suma**, from the Pacific Islands Province, is at present in the European Province, experiencing community life in the UK.

**Christopher** has been granted Leave of Absence. *f*



*Nicholas Alan SSF made his profession in life vows at St Mary at the Cross, Glasshampton on 25 May, in the presence of the Bishop Protector, Michael Scott-Joynt, First and Third Order Brothers and Sisters, and many of his family and friends, notably monks and nuns from the Buddhist communities at Amaravati Monastery.*



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### Precious in God's Sight (Quiet Day)

19 October, led by Jennie CSF

### The Servant King (Quiet Day)

7 December, led by Helen Julian CSF

\*

*Quiet Days are from 10am to 4pm; drinks are provided & please bring a packed lunch.*

\*

For more details and guideline contribution, contact:

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Tel: 01460 240473 Fax: 01460 242360 email: [comptondurvillecsf@franciscans.org.uk](mailto:comptondurvillecsf@franciscans.org.uk)

## Hilfield Friary 2002

### Stigmata Festival

*Saturday 21 September (beginning with mass at noon)*

\*

### Pre-Advent Quiet Day

*Saturday 30 November*

\*

For more information about these or any other events at Hilfield, please contact

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## Book Reviews

Br Ramon SSF & Simon Barrington-Ward  
**Praying the Jesus Prayer Together**  
 ISBN 1-84101-147-9

BRF, London, 2001, £6.99

'That is my half of the book,' [Ramon] said, 'I hope you won't mind, but I've finished it and it's complete, just waiting for your half! You see, I was in a bit of a hurry!' Ramon completed his part of this book during a 'kind of plateau' of improved health and physical strength prior to his death from cancer in June 2000, and Bishop Simon completed the project later. I had eagerly awaited the publication of their book, although when I first held a copy in my hand I realised that I wasn't quite sure exactly what kind of work it was. In places it is the kind of systematic teaching on the Jesus Prayer I had expected, with a chapter for instance by both authors on the biblical basis, and another from Ramon of practical 'how to do it' teaching. The book doesn't start there though, because it really is what the title implies: a description of life in its ups and downs, and spiritual friendship, based in the practice together of this simple yet profound way of prayer. It is not really surprising, then, that both authors provide touching reflections on their different experiences of Ramon's illness and death – and surely it is forgivable in the circumstances that the text as a whole felt just a little disjointed. We read, too, how others have been drawn together in this way of prayer through the ministry of 'the bishop and the hermit'.

For me, perhaps the most moving chapter was the final one. Here Bishop Simon describes how the Orthodox monastery in Essex, where both he and Ramon had learned so much, was founded by the Russian Archimandrite Sophrony (who died in 1993), who in his turn had found a spiritual guide in Saint Silouan, at that time (1930) a relatively obscure monk of Mount Athos. That final chapter is about so much more, but I was moved by the sense of being able to share in the wisdom of the Desert Fathers, passed on from person to person through the centuries to our own day. This did prove to be a book that helped me to pray.

*Desmond Alban SSF*

Adrian House  
**Francis of Assisi**  
 ISBN 0-7126-6814-4

Pimlico, London, 2001, £12.50

The inspirational figure of St Francis of Assisi has attracted and fascinated innumerable men and women for almost eight centuries. The paperback version of one of the latest biographies of this saint comes with eight pages of illustrations in

colour. In preparing this handsome monograph, the author spent six months in Assisi and visited many of the places associated with the saint. His knowledge of Umbria and other regions of Italy enriches this biography. His investment of time bears fruit in the amount of local information which enlivens the description of diverse episodes in the life of the saint. House's visits were not confined to the major sanctuaries and two examples illustrate the level of thoroughness displayed by the author. First, the visit to Fabiano where the saint had gone for medical attention. The ailing Francis withdrew from Rieti (where the papal court was assembled) and lodged with the priest, whose vines suffered as a result of the stream of visitors who came to see Francis. Local traditions associating the saint with the priest's house and a nearby cave are recorded by House, who even noted the tracks of mice at the latter. Secondly, the account of the saint's return to Assisi is replete with local information and a description of the annual commemoration, by men on horses and ponies, of the saint's last journey. An abundance of historical information on the period and the locality is furnished by House, who seeks to remedy one of the causes of frustration felt by the general reader, that is: the specialist's reluctance to peer into areas of the saint's life which are not illuminated by his early biographers. House delves into the questions of Francis's experience as a merchant, his emotional development, the miracles associated with animals and the stigmata. In each instance the exposition is lengthy and searching questions are posed. Addressing the question of Francis's virginity, House notes that the early biographers do not identify his 'early girlfriends'.

The portrait of Cardinal Ugolino is unsympathetic and at variance with the

saint's own ecclesiology, which was marked by some conservative elements. Ugolino had protected the fledgling fraternity from its critics at the papal court, had ensured that the Rule was formally approved by Honorius III on 30 November 1223 and his advice had saved Francis from a number of pitfalls. It is contentious to style him as a man 'whose paramount loyalty was to the Church of Rome'. In contrast, Francis and Clare were depicted as seeking the gospel and the kingdom of heaven. We are told that Francis went out of his way to receive the sacraments from priests living in concubinage. It is true that the saint was acutely aware of clerical failings which he tried to correct. Evidence that he displayed a marked preference for the ministrations of wayward priests, rather than those of priests whose conduct reflected the reforms of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, finds no place in the early biographies. Thomas of Celano, the saint's first biographer, was depicted as a 'Church propagandist' in failing to give an account of the establishment of the Poor Clares. This interpretation is corrected by Celano's *Vita prima*, which enumerates the virtues of the sisters at San Damiano and undoubtedly caused a few blushes among them. House, who rightly draws attention to misogynous passages in *Vita secunda*, surpasses Celano in caution and discretion by choosing not to name the two sources which attest that Francis had had sexual experience. In some instances the medieval sources have been misinterpreted. Jacques de Vitry is incorrectly described as bishop of Liege; elsewhere he is properly named as the bishop of Acre. Thomas of Eccleston does not report that Francis removed his habit to cover the naked corpse of Innocent III in July 1216. John de Brienne, king of Jerusalem, was received into the first order rather than the third order. Nonetheless, House's study is engaging and would be a good companion for a visit to Assisi and the sanctuaries associated with the saint. This biography offers fresh insights for the more seasoned students of the life of one of the best-loved saints in Christendom.

*Michael Robson, OFM Conv*

Margaret Silf  
**Wayfaring**  
*A Gospel Journey into Life*  
 0-232-52403-3

DLT, London, 2001, £9.95

Reading *Wayfaring* has been an incredibly worthwhile challenge. With impaired vision I had wondered whether I would be able to read the book in a way that was conducive for reviewing. So as a test, during my recent retreat I read Margaret Silf's earlier book, *Landmarks*, which gave me a feel for her and for the actual print used. Reading *Wayfaring* has been thrilling, taking the typical Ignatian theme of creation, incarnation, death and resurrection in a vibrant readable way. I

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found myself getting really excited – it was as if I was on a horse having a wonderful ride in the countryside – so much to see, and every now and then having to pull the reins so I could stop and take stock, view the scenery and acknowledge the Creator. The format encourages this with lots of bible passages to ponder over, and helpful questions to prompt and enable the meditation. There are also a number of drawings and quotations which help cement some of the ideas. So it was not surprising when I got to the last chapter 'Funnel of Love' that the image of an hour glass was equally helpful. There is so much to be absorbed, learned and experienced being part of God's creation that, from time to time, we must let the experiences filter through and take us right to the initial cell we were at the beginning of our existence, better to grasp it in relation to our growing and deepening relationship with God.

As I read the book I became very aware of being on a journey – an amazing journey, wanting to read on and discover more about God, yet knowing that I will only know God better by taking time to stop, look and listen. Early in the book, there is an extremely valuable section on busyness. I think all of us who have workaholic tendencies should have this section writ large, to remind us how damaging and futile excessive busyness can be. I have already shared the essence of this with people in spiritual direction.

Margaret combines an easy-flowing language with apt analogies which speak most vividly. Her God-insights are very powerful and my understanding has deepened as a result of reading this book. I warmly recommend it, not only to those who value Ignatian spirituality, but also to anyone who wants to journey deeper into God while firmly keeping their feet on the ground.

**Phyllis CSF**

James Cowan

### **Francis: A Saint's Way**

Hodder & Stoughton, London, 2001, £10.99  
ISBN 0-340-78608-6

I enjoyed this book. It is a bit wacky at times, and the author comes up with some surprising ideas, but because of that it gives a fresh outlook on Francis beyond the more hagiographical tone common among his biographers.

The book is a kind of travel diary, written as the author wandered around Umbria and the towns and places connected with Francis, recording his reflections on the spirit that animated Francis. He tells the story of Francis, but the emphasis is much more on the spirituality of Francis, and how he was influenced by the places in which he chose to live.

James Cowan is not a Franciscan specialist. This comes out in a number of factual errors, such as attributing a story about Brother Giles to Thomas of Celano, when it comes

from the *Little Flowers*, or saying that the cross that spoke to Saint Francis is still at San Damiano (that is a replica – the original is at the Basilica of Saint Clare). But these are minor points and if you want factual detail there are plenty of more scholarly biographies to try. This one is more of an impressionist portrait and its strength is in its leaps of imagination. Sometimes I was left a little bemused by these leaps, as when he says: 'It's said that [Francis] was fascinated with the constellations of Ursa Major and Ursa Minor, seeing in them the stellar orchestration of the names of his later orders, the Friars Major and the Friars Minor.' Where he got that from I have no idea, but it's an interesting thought: a lost order of Friars Major. Could this be the Fourth Order?

One connection that is brought out in this book is the possible influence of Sufi mysticism on Francis during his visit to Egypt and Palestine. This is not often discussed and deserves greater consideration. Eckhart, too, gets a few mentions and it is really Francis as a mystic in the context of medieval spirituality that the author is trying to discover.

Perhaps the central theme, however, is the spirituality of place. How do our surroundings form our spirituality? In the course of his reflections, the author vividly brings to mind the places connected with Francis and imaginatively dialogues with the Francis who stood on that same ground. If nothing else this book may arouse a desire for pilgrimage.

**Nicholas Alan SSF**

Michael Paul Gallagher

### **Dive Deeper**

#### **The Human Poetry of Faith**

0-232-52408-4

DLT, London, 2001, £8.95

There are three lines in Rilke's long poem *Of the Monastic Life* which I wonder if Michael Paul Gallagher had somewhere in the back of his mind when he wrote this book. Rilke is talking to God:

*You are not yet cold, nor is time too spent  
for us, into your deepening depths to be diving  
where Life is so silently present.*

*Dive Deeper* is a call to give the imagination, your imagination and mine, a chance to bring things to the surface. Gallagher is a teacher at the Gregorian University in Rome and previously he taught literature at University College Dublin, and he has come to believe that for many, the language of Christianity has gone stale. We need to dive deeper to get beneath the surface of the tired language, and connect with ideas and feelings which are a common treasure for a far wider group of people. These treasures, are to be discovered in what Gallagher calls, a 'pre-religious' zone.

Literature is Gallagher's world, and he has a great facility for handling it in interesting

and surprising ways. The heart of this book is a series of six fictional dialogues, in which an issue is discussed. For example, Jane Austen and D.H. Lawrence discuss friendship; Shakespeare and Oscar Romero discuss suffering; and, back to Rilke, Rilke the poet, and Karl Rahner the theologian, discuss – rather more obtusely – the starting point for reality. Do we begin with the 'eternal' with Rilke, or do we begin with the mess on the study floor with Karl Rahner? Dialogue is an ancient form of getting at the truth, and I found it a really interesting and lively book. The margins are spattered with my appreciative pencil marks.

I fear, though, that this book might disappoint more people than it encourages. There is not quite enough scholarship for the Rilke 'buff', and probably a bit too much for those floundering for want of a few basic Christian truths. Which is a pity, because I can imagine Gallagher is a first-rate teacher with those groups who are lucky enough to share with him his fertile and generous mind.

**David Scott, Companion**

Malcolm Rothwell

### **Journeying With God**

#### **An Exploration of Ignatian Spirituality**

ISBN 0-7162-0549-1

Epworth Press, Peterborough, 2001, £9.95

The author, a Methodist Minister, begins by setting the scene from the background of his own life and then from a historical context of theology and secular change. Posing questions as to the presence or the action of God in this world, he goes on to discuss the reality of vocation as the invitation of God, in regard to which we must make choices. Our environment, the events of everyday life, influences from outside ourselves: all play their part and mediate alternatives. 'Ultimately,' he says, 'the choices we make define us as people and define our philosophy of life. Where is our deepest self engaged?'

After a brief résumé of the life of Ignatius Loyola and description of *The Spiritual Exercises*, Rothwell then speaks of his own experiences in making a thirty-day retreat. He includes a chapter on prayer and silence, then goes on to discuss human fragility, the encounter with evil, acknowledgement of weakness, collusion, and our need for forgiveness. He points up how emotions may affect our spiritual progress; how laughter and tears are very often two sides of the same coin; and how the integration of head and heart are needed as we move towards God and the discernment of the will of God.

Starting from his own preferred intellectual perspective, Rothwell is generously and simply honest in recounting the changes in his own life, with movement into the heart and a more emotional approach as he focusses on Jesus and enters into the mystery of the Cross and Resurrection. He references



*The Exercises* at every point.

This is a deeply personal book, a re-telling of profound experience, of the writer's own deliberations within his retreat, and 'conversations' with the stories of Jesus in the gospels. It scarcely needs saying that no two persons have the same experience or are endowed with the same temperament. Some are gifted with ready imagination and picture-conjuring; some need time and practice to acquire such assets; and these must affect our experience in a retreat. This book will be of interest to many, and not only to those contemplating *The Exercises*.

*Elizabeth CSF*

James Alison  
**Faith beyond resentment:  
Fragments catholic and gay**  
ISBN 0-232-52411-4

*DLT, London, 2001, £10.95*

In the words of Alison, this book is not a 'symphonically elegant treatise on the unbinding of the gay conscience', but instead each chapter is more akin to 'a pit stop on the camel route to Egypt'. And indeed, each chapter of this book provides much food for thought as well as opportunities for connections for the sensitive reader.

Through this collection of ten talks and papers written between 1995 and 2000, Alison, a Roman Catholic priest, takes us on a journey – his journey – which, tentatively at first, and then with more assurance, seeks to show the ordinariness as well as God-giveness of gay experience, despite the painful reality of trying to live this out with integrity as a member of the Roman Catholic church.

In each of his papers, Alison takes as a starting point either familiar bible stories, from the healing of the blind man to the gerasene demoniac, or stories from his own life or from others around him. From these, in a style which engages both the reader's mind and heart, he develops themes which are so painfully relevant to gay people – but not only gay people – in the church today: themes of denial, exclusion, marginalization and the misuse of power by the institutions. And he also draws us to explore the part we ourselves play in all of these.

Many passages from 'Faith beyond resentment' resonated with my own experience, and have helped me (forced me?) to confront the reality of the religious systems within which we all operate, often so far away from the radical message of unconditional love that Jesus preached. Whilst written from a Roman Catholic standpoint, this book is relevant to anyone struggling with the issues of inclusivity and the treatment of those who are 'different' in the Christian churches. It would make a good starting point for group study and discussion.

*Bertrand Olivier*

Angela Tilby  
**Son of God**

ISBN 0 340 78646 9

*Hodder & Stoughton, London, 2001, £7.99*

This is the 'book of the film' – the BBC documentary series popularising recent academic research into the life of Jesus. It's well written, easy to read, and much needed, given the gulf between University lecture rooms and church pews.

It's worth thinking about Jesus' first-century context. I had not realised that only four miles away from Nazareth was the large Roman town of Sepphoris, compete with forum and public baths. Joseph, the carpenter, may have worked there. And it is difficult to believe that Jesus never visited. But we don't imagine him in that setting. One of the most controversial parts of the Son of God project was the reconstruction of a contemporary Jewish head using a first-century skull. It isn't Jesus, but it is suggested that the broad, rectangular face, with a large hooked nose, a thick neck and a heavy, powerful jaw-line is more likely to resemble him than our traditional images.

As someone involved in Jewish-Christian relations, I was particularly interested in the depiction of first-century Judaism. Jesus is compared to other Galilean holy men with gifts of healing. And it is recognised that he shared a great deal with the Pharisees. The priestly caste, the purity system and the temple have become the villains. I am not convinced! To call the temple 'the heart of darkness' is going too far. If Jesus ate a Passover meal as his last supper, the centrepiece will have been a lamb slaughtered in the temple. It is too convenient for us to argue that Jesus' main target was the purity system, given that we have not got one, or think we have not.

There are many 'facts' in this book which I am sure are still in dispute. And it does not, for me, quite capture what it was that made Jesus mean so much to people, then and now. Neither does it begin to resolve the issue of how we integrate the 'Jesus of history' with the 'Christ of Faith'. But it is a challenging reminder of all that scholarship can contribute to our understanding of Jesus.

*Ann Conway-Jones*

Christopher Stace  
**St George – Patron Saint of England**  
ISBN 0-281-05415-0

*Triangle, London, 2002, £7.99*

The fact that England claims for its patron saint one who was not of British descent and who had never set foot in this land has often mystified us. It is perhaps additionally strange that St George's popularity has not materially waned even in a more critical age, when one considers the fact that we know hardly anything about him with certainty.

Christopher Stace examines this phenomenon and comes to the conclusion that in the course of time St George has

'changed'. First he was a comparatively unknown historical figure; then he became the subject of many fantastic legends (including the well-known story of the dragon); and finally he has become an ideal, a symbol of chivalry and knighthood.

The author points out that the actual existence of George is nowadays generally accepted, even though he admits that little is known of his life. He sees no reason to doubt the widely held view that he died as a martyr in the fourth century, and that his tomb at Lydda (now Lod) in Palestine could well be authentic. He attributes the spread of the story of slaying the dragon to the popularity of the thirteenth-century writing entitled *The Golden Legend* which was printed in England by Caxton in 1483.

But by then, he had already become a favourite saint in this country. Stace points out that St George had inspired the Crusaders, and that King Richard the Lionheart had brought his devotion back to England, where eventually he displaced Edward the Confessor as patron saint.

It is a fascinating study and presented in a compelling way. This small book is easy to read and a mine of information.

*Martin SSF*

Wayne Simsic  
**Living the Wisdom of Saint Francis**  
ISBN 0-281-05491-6

*SPCK London, 2001, £8.99*

Wayne Simsic has given us a book of just over thirty meditations (perhaps reflections might have been a better word) to help us in our Christian journey. Based on the life of Francis they are grouped in three sections: 'Toward a sense of kinship', 'Opening the heart', and 'Learning to sing'. Each meditation follows the same format: a sentence or two, taken from one of the early Franciscan sources followed by a few paragraphs of reflection; a question to mull over; and ending with a short prayer, a few of which are by Francis. I am sure readers will find, as I did, that one section or particular reflection resonate more than others, and that is the strength of a book such as this, for it has a range and content wide enough to touch most of us.

This book will be of use to you if you already know the story of Francis well, for Simsic is not offering a biography and some themes and events are missing. This may be as a result of the aim to offer what is seen as 'positive' today, for we are told it is to 'introduce the joyful singing saint in a way that invites participation', and you are being 'invited to uncover the song of the Spirit in your own life with Francis as your guide'.

Obviously you will need more than just this book fully to appreciate all that Francis can offer you, but it could be a useful addition to, and help for, your Franciscan and Christian journey.

*Austin SSF*